



## Mark Parry – Instructional Designer and Media Producer

---

*Welcome to what I hope will be the first of many posts profiling the careers of ex-teachers. Mark Parry from [Parryville Media](#) graciously agreed to be the guinea-pig to trial the 10 question routine. He shares a unique strategy for identifying work that interests you and logical steps to get started on an alternative career path. I'll hand it over to Mark to explain his early career and where his education qualifications have taken him.*

### **What are your qualifications and experience in classroom teaching?**

- Bachelor of Education (BEd – Science)
- Information Technology Certificate IV (Multimedia)
- Master of Arts (MA – Media Arts and Production)

I worked as a high school science teacher from 1989 to 1995 (first stepping in front of a class in 1986 when I was 17). I've also taught at schools in London, UK and at an American summer camp in Maine.

Other classroom teaching since then has been mostly with adult learners: staff professional development, corporate training, university lecturing, adults with special needs, conference workshops etc.

### **How do you explain what you currently do to make a living?**

I'm a freelance instructional designer and media producer (see [Parryville Media](#) for more info). Each week is different, since I tend to work from project-to-project. I have previously performed these roles with various employers eg TAFE NSW, NSW Department of Education and Communities and Macquarie University. Typical tasks are educational consulting, writing learning content and lesson plans, taking photos, designing posters and other publications, planning websites, providing educational and pedagogical advice, curriculum development and mapping, planning and developing e-learning, capturing and editing educational videos. In addition, I also teach (adult-learners) a couple of

days a week (documentary production for film students; educational technology and pedagogy for pre-service primary school teachers). My work is diverse and enjoyable.

### **Can you give some background about how you decided to leave the classroom?**

The first few years of classroom teaching was interesting, flexible and enjoyable. After experiencing some challenging (!) classes during several school terms, I began to reflect on the positives and negatives of my day-to-day classroom experience. There were also some family-related matters that shifted my outlook to my work. I was an enthusiastic user of computers ([mac classic](#)), video and other media in my classroom and around this time I saw a computer kiosk in a museum (featuring educational videos and animations) and this triggered an interest in how computers and videos could be used in teaching to make the student experience more engaging and interesting. I thought I might like to work in an area related to developing this sort of electronic resource. I initially left the classroom with a vague plan of writing an illustrated children's book about the moon! (which hasn't yet happened, BTW).

### **How long did it take you to make the transition?**

It took a few years. Being a casual relief teacher, it was simple to take a break for a school term or two to explore other options. I moved suburbs and picked up more casual teaching at other smaller schools. This was enjoyable and restored my interest in classroom teaching for awhile. I kept with teaching for another year or so, balanced with other employment (eg museum guide, picture-framing shop, film extra, photo restoration). I'd applied for other jobs, but didn't end up taking them on (eg educational sales). One of my teaching jobs was just one day per week at a school of distance education. This introduced a whole new approach to teaching, around the time when dial-up internet was first coming into schools. This led to further work writing print resources (eg poultry production for agriculture) and developing video and e-learning materials, initially for high school students and later for vocational adult-learners. I've also explored working for universities and corporate training. At the moment I prefer being employed in part-time roles—as a lecturer—combined with short freelance educational video projects. Education is still central to my work, so after 20 years I might still be making the transition!

### **What are the top three things someone should know or do in order to successfully change careers?**

1. Self-awareness of your existing skills and attributes. An awareness of how these are transferable to other employment (whether or not related to teaching). Some skills and attributes might be known under a different title, depending on the work sector. Gaps in your skills can potentially be addressed with further training, experience and study.

2. Knowledge and awareness of the dynamic employment landscape and the jobs and other opportunities that are out there. Mention your aims to (selected) friends, acquaintances and colleagues so they can keep an eye out for you.

3. Maintaining optimism and an open attitude whilst being organised. Keep your general approach quite practical. Learn to be comfortable with a degree of uncertainty.



### **What is the best way to get started?**

Spend some time doing reconnaissance. I started to collect job advertisements that were loosely (or specifically) related to teaching and/or my subject area of science and/or previous employment experience (eg retail). For example, by scanning employment advertisements, I discovered that I was suitable for jobs related to educational sales. If you see a job ad you like, but lack some of the skills, think about extra training and professional development. I think life-long learning is important. Over several years of training and on-the-job experience I developed competency in various areas that led to future employment: multimedia, design, desktop publishing, interviewing, advertising, media, video production etc. All of these courses were fun, built my skills and introduced me to like-minded people and valuable contacts. Initially, I was quite shy about self-promotion and networking but have learned these are valuable in career transition. Employment and social networking sites such as Seek, LinkedIn and Twitter are ideal.

### **What advice would you give to anyone wanting to do what you have done?**

If you are looking further afield for work prospects, I think it's important to realise that wishing things might be different is just a starting point; you need to actually get in and take some sort of action. Attend conferences, do some training or research related to the field you are interested in moving into. Even an activity such as downloading and exploring trial software (or similar) is useful. With basic and more complex preparation you're more likely to be ready when an opportunity arises and be able to step up and demonstrate

your enthusiasm, skills and abilities. Again, I think self-reflection is important since it helps to clarify what it is that you will enjoy doing for work; whether or not this is related to teaching. I tend to visualize this as three circles in a Venn diagram:

1. what are you good at?
2. what do you enjoy doing?
3. what will people pay you to do?

The aim is to eventually get to the spot where all the circles overlap.

It's important to collect evidence of your skills and abilities and understand you may not be acting solo in a vacuum. Many work situations exist within a collaborative frame. Whilst it's important to acknowledge your own contributions and achievements it's also important to acknowledge input from others with whom you may have collaborated.

### **What were some of the problems you faced?**

Initially, a lack of experience (in work areas outside of teaching) was an obstacle. I addressed this by enrolling in various TAFE and other courses, volunteering, seeking out other situations to gain experience. Some of the jobs I was offered were very low paying, especially with bills to pay. When I worked in a museum, the pay rate was almost on par with volunteering. Gaining experience was important, so I balanced this with other income and saw the situation from a broader viewpoint. In hindsight, this position lasted for only a short period of time, but it allowed me to gain valuable experience and enthusiasm for educational communication, developing educational programs, displays and learning materials, liaising with managers, workload etc.

Unfortunately, I found the title of "school teacher" was sometimes a problem when seeking work. Potential employers, especially in corporate contexts, seemed to interpret this title under their own limited definition. I learned, instead, to articulate the skills and attributes I could bring to the position and link these to specific criteria and the job-role.

I've experienced other assorted setbacks, disappointments and problems. The key is to remain calm and confident in your abilities, maintain optimism and keep moving. If you're organised, have a general direction and you keep your eyes open then—trying not to sound too corny—opportunities will eventually present themselves. Be ready to act even if they aren't an exact match.

### **Which teaching skills have proved to be most valuable?**

When making a career transition, valuable skills include: resilience, perseverance, flexibility, responding quickly and effectively to change, being observant and thinking creatively.

In my actual job role(s), valuable skills include: leadership, management, communication, planning, flexibility, being organised, working well in a group, conflict resolution, supporting and motivating others, providing constructive advice and feedback, interpreting and simplifying complex information, using technology, time management and empathy.

**If you had one secret to give about changing careers what would it be?**

Discover more about yourself and then follow your own guidance. Make yourself useful!